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CCA's Homeless White Paper

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Fri, Nov 20, 2015 at 10:53 AM

To: Carol Schatz <cschatz@ccala.org>

Cc: Marie Rumsey <MRumsey@ccala.org>, "leela.annkapur@lacity.org" <leela.annkapur@lacity.org>

Thanks very much, Carol.

On Fri, Nov 20, 2015 at 10:40 AM, Carol Schatz <cschatz@ccala.org> wrote:

Dear Mike:

Enclosed you will find the Central City Association's (CCA) recommendations regarding the complex issue of homelessness. There is no issue more important to CCA than homelessness and we are committed to working with you and all other interested stakeholders to develop and implement solutions.

We appreciate the City's commitment to this issue and hope you will consider CCA a partner. We look forward to our continued work together.

Sincerely,

Carol E. Schatz

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President & CEO



Homelessness is a human tragedy, and the growth in the homeless population has thrust the Los Angeles region into a State of Emergency. The consequences for our communities and the homeless are dire, and greatly impact the quality of life for all. We offer this white paper to provide immediate recommendations for the City to address this State of Emergency. We commend the efforts by the City and County to date, but now is the time for bold action.

To address this growing problem, we must:

- **RECOGNIZE THE HOMELESS POPULATION IS VARIED** - We believe there must be a multi-faceted approach that includes shelters, and bridge housing, as well as permanent supportive housing. We know the homeless population has varied needs, and programs should be uniquely tailored to respond to those needs effectively.
- **PROMOTE PUBLIC SAFETY** - Remove items from the sidewalks in a reasonable and timely manner. Tents, furniture and debris fill City sidewalks, negatively impacting our businesses and residents and posing a public health and safety danger to all who live and travel through the area.
- **MAKE GOVERNMENT MORE RESPONSIVE** - Restructure LAHSA to comply with the HEARTH Act. Establish a Housing Unit at City Planning to develop new policies to increase housing production and consider devoting additional City staff to work solely on the coordination of homeless services.
- **INVOLVE THE PRIVATE SECTOR** - Provide incentives to create new housing. The House LA Initiative is a good start and we encourage the City to review best practices in other cities. Consider more cost effective ways to provide housing, including the use of alternative materials.

Los Angeles has reached a tipping point as a city, and we must take immediate action to address those already living on the City's streets. We must act to prevent individuals from ever becoming homeless. Better educational opportunities, more housing at all income levels and increased employment are critical. Layers of services devoted to helping people cope with mental illness and overcome addiction before they fall into homelessness must be an integral part of any approach. Most of all, the City needs private investment to continue and must foster an environment to support that investment. While we must address this current State of Emergency, we must also seek out long-term solutions to address homelessness.

RECOGNIZE THE HOMELESS POPULATION IS VARIED

The Homeless Initiative Plan and recent financial allocations by the City and County are positive steps forward. We know the homeless population is varied, and any solution going forward requires a multi-pronged approach. As the City and County work to develop plans, we encourage the full spectrum of housing solutions to be considered. Shelters are valuable tools to get people off of the streets and stabilized. Bridge housing can play an important role for those who recently lost a job or experienced a life-changing event causing homelessness. Permanent supportive housing is critical for homeless individuals who need long-term care.

Recommendations:

1. The City Council and the Mayor should host a Conference of Mayors to discuss regional solutions to homelessness. The City of Los Angeles cannot be the only City in the County allocating new resources for providing homeless services. Each City must be held accountable and asked to make a commitment to homeless services.
2. In addition to permanent supportive housing, the City and County must fund alternative options, such as detoxification centers, shelters and bridge housing.
3. Homeless services must be regionalized. We support the conversion of existing facilities that serve homeless individuals in Skid Row. For example, the current drop-in center would be a good location for a detoxification facility. However, we do not support any new facilities in Skid Row or in Downtown.
4. Housing for Health, which is operated by the LA County Department of Health Services, should be expanded and the City should consider providing funding to their Flexible Housing Subsidy Pool. It should be noted this currently only serves County hospital patients.
5. The City should also allocate funds to the Coordinated Entry System (CES) to serve homeless individuals within City limits. Not all homeless seek care at a County hospitals. CES is the only viable option for non-county hospitals to connect a homeless individual to housing in a coordinated manner.
6. As the City discusses developing storage facilities throughout the City and outside of Downtown, there should be consideration given to having public restrooms, showers and shelter housing at these facilities. Public restrooms and showers should not be placed on the public right-of-way.
7. The County's mobile mental health van can be utilized at shelters and storage facilities to connect people to services. The City could consider funding this van.
8. The City should also consider an ordinance that would mandate homeless services in every community. The ordinance findings could be based on overcrowding, lack of affordable housing or lack of fair share. This ordinance could help site new services in multiple communities, and assist when there are community objections to siting new services.

We need to make sure that there are adequate case workers in all shelter, bridge housing and permanent supportive housing locations to help homeless individuals qualify for Social Security Income

(SSI) benefits. General Relief (GR) in the County of Los Angeles is \$221 per month and some people who are homeless would qualify for SSI benefits, raising their income to about \$850 per month, which would make more housing options accessible to them.¹

Recommendations:

1. The City should work with experienced legal organizations to have a presence at these locations and help people through the abundance of paperwork required to qualify for this assistance.
2. The County is also engaged in an effort to shift people from GR to SSI, and the effort could be expanded with City resources.
3. There must be housing locaters who regularly work at the shelters.

There is also the General Relief Housing Case Management that the County administers, but it is limited to approximately 1,200 people per year on a first-come basis.² The objective of the Project is to assist the homeless population receiving General Relief with a rent subsidy, and to coordinate access to other necessary supportive services.

Recommendation:

1. The City should partner with the County to take this program to scale and serve additional homeless people.

PROMOTE PUBLIC SAFETY (LAMC 56.11)

The City must maintain sidewalks and other public right-of-ways in a clean and safe manner. The City must have a tool to immediately remove items that pose an immediate health and safety risk.

Recommendations:

1. As the City deliberates on the implementation of this ordinance, we recommend that you review reducing the required storage time from 90 days to 30 days. This will ensure greater turnover at storage facilities and still provide individuals with an established timeframe to claim personal goods. The Bin storage facility being operated by Chrysalis in Downtown can share experiences and recommend best practices related to required storage time.
2. Consider placing a limit on the amount of personal goods an individual can maintain. For example, the City of Chicago allows three luggage bags per individual.
3. Utilize the Homeless Citation Court as an alternative enforcement mechanism that does not criminalize homelessness.

¹ <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2010/02/la-county-to-pursue-more-federal-aid-for-poorest-residents.html>

² http://dpss.lacounty.gov/dpss/GR/pdf/GR_Housing_Subsidy_Project_Fact_Sheet.pdf

There is a concentration of homeless services in Skid Row and almost every effort to address homelessness has been employed. From portable toilets to public showers, Skid Row can share lessons learned. The portable toilets that once lined Skid Row were a public health and safety disaster and were removed. We understand the need to provide homeless individuals with a place to use the restroom and suggest a sustainable solution.

Recommendation:

1. The City should fund the existing shelters in Skid Row to allow for their bathrooms to be accessible 24/7. Currently, the Midnight Mission is the only facility that has round-the-clock access. Special emphasis should be given to provision of bathrooms for all genders.

OPERATION HEALTHY STREETS (OHS) IN SKID ROW

In response to a 2012 citation from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) the City established OHS to address the deplorable health conditions in Skid Row.³ Through OHS, the City has provided significant resources to increase outreach and emergency services, street cleanings and the provision of a storage facility for the area. Although the City has committed significant resources to OHS, the sidewalks in Skid Row remain in a condition that easily harbors serious infectious diseases, promotes infestation, and poses a significant health threat to the community.

Recommendations:

1. The City should ask DPH to reassess the Skid Row area. This will help assess if OHS is frequent enough to be effective. The City may consider requesting DPH to assess other areas as well.
2. The City should continue to partner with the County through the City+County+Community (C3) initiative to connect homeless individuals with resources.⁴
3. We support the Los Angeles Police Department's Identifying Super-users for Services via Outreach (I.S.S.O) program in Skid Row and believe it could be an effective model citywide. We encourage the City to expand this pilot program to other areas of the City.

MAKE GOVERNMENT MORE RESPONSIVE

The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) is a joint powers authority (JPA) of the City and the County of Los Angeles and is the clearing house for the disbursement of homeless-related funds. The LAHSA Commission recently established an Ad Hoc Continuum of Care Governance Committee to redefine its governance structure to be in compliance with the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act.

³ http://clkrep.lacity.org/online/docs/2014/14-0424_rpt_cao_4-7-14.pdf

⁴ http://clkrep.lacity.org/online/docs/2014/14-0424-S2_mot_08-11-2015.pdf

Recommendations:

1. This process should be used to bring together the various entities who are involved with homelessness including: Department of Mental Health, Department of Public Health, the Department of Child and Family Services, L.A. County Sheriff's Department, L.A. City Attorney, Los Angeles Police Department and other appropriate County and City departments.
2. We propose that elected officials and community stakeholders also be included in the governance structure.
3. The JPA provides for one LAHSA commissioner to be a Downtown business representative and that seat should be filled accordingly.

The City needs to create an exempt, non-civil service "general manager" level position tasked with ending homelessness, including the establishment of measurable outcomes. The City should also establish a Housing Unit at City Planning to work on creative solutions to increase housing production and preservation.

Recommendations:

1. This "general manager" should be part of the City Administrative Office and focus on homeless resource coordination. Other responsibilities should include improving coordination among departments such as the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Police Department, the City Attorney, the Bureaus of Street Services and Sanitation, and elected officials' offices.
2. This position should also serve on the LAHSA commission and/or Governance Committee.
3. The position must be given the resources and ability by the City to be successful in this role.
4. This position should also directly liaise with the business community on possible public/private partnerships.
5. This "general manager" could also partner with LAHSA to fully develop the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). HMIS should be able to tell us how many people are served in each program, their length of stay, exit destination and how often people experience repeat episodes of homelessness. A detailed HMIS could lead to performance-based contracting and help the City and County effectively utilize resources.
6. Add staff to a Housing Unit at City Planning to address the housing crisis.

We also need to focus on changing the McKinney-Vento Act, the Federal funding formula for homeless assistance. The Act disburses funds to states based on the age of the housing stock and population growth lag, which disadvantages Los Angeles.⁵

⁵ http://clkrep.lacity.org/online/docs/2012/12-0002-S87_RPT_CLA_10-10-12.pdf

Recommendation:

1. The City should partner with the State and continue to advocate at the Federal level for a funding formula based on poverty levels, housing rent burden, availability of affordable housing and rates of overcrowding. This will help bring additional resources to California.

The City should also work with HUD on the definition of homelessness. For example, inmates who serve 90 days or more of custody in the County jail do not qualify as homeless, even if they were homeless before they entered the jail. Instead, they would have to reestablish homelessness, such as by going to an emergency shelter, before they can be processed on a list for suitable housing.

Recommendation:

1. The City should partner with Federal, State and County representatives to change this definition.

INVOLVE THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The City of Seattle has a successful program to encourage residential property owners to dedicate existing units as affordable housing. In Seattle, the Multifamily Tax Exemption (MFTE) Program gives developers a 12-year property tax break on new and rehabilitated apartment buildings. In exchange, the developers agree to keep 25% of the building affordable up to 75% Average Median Income (AMI). A similar program in Los Angeles could produce affordable units quickly and requires no new public funding.

Recommendations:

1. The City should partner with the County to Implement a Multifamily Tax Exemption (MFTE) Program to increase affordable housing in existing and new apartment buildings.
2. This effort could also be used to preserve affordable units that are about to expire.
3. Consider implementing a Property Tax Abatement Program for New Residential Construction. Owners are exempt from paying a percentage of the increase in property taxes which results from the new construction in exchange for the provision of affordable housing. The number of years and percentage of abatement can be determined based on level of affordability and length of affordability covenant.
4. Engage the Department of Building & Safety to consider alternative building materials like shipping containers for construction and allow for new construction methods to be utilized.
5. Fully fund Housing Unit at City Planning to work on incentive based policies such as House LA and the Density Bonus Ordinance.

CCA offers these recommendations because the homelessness crisis has become an emergency. We recognize that there are no easy answers to this issue. Our attention to this issue and the people that it affects cannot waver. CCA is committed to working with the City, County and others to help end this emergency and the causes that preceded it.